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ABSTRACT

In this activity students (in pairs) become explorers and map readers tracing the best land routes to travel between select U.S. cities. They learn who were the first known explorers who broke the trails and who were the first groups of people to follow the trails. The activity tasks each pair of students with instructions to determine the possible routes and the best routes between two cities (assigned by the teacher), to highlight the agreed-upon routes on the maps provided, and then, using topographical maps, determine the route used by the early trailblazers, the mountain men and the pioneers. The activity asks students to compare and contrast the highlighted route and the trailblazer's route, take on the role of the trailblazer or pathfinder, and give a first-person presentation to the class. The unit provides a four step process, listing accompanying resources; offers learning advice; discusses evaluation; and addresses reflection and conclusion. The teacher notes section of the activity identifies grade level/unit; addresses California state standards; outlines the lesson's purpose; suggests length of lesson; notes resource materials needed; and offers background information. (BT)

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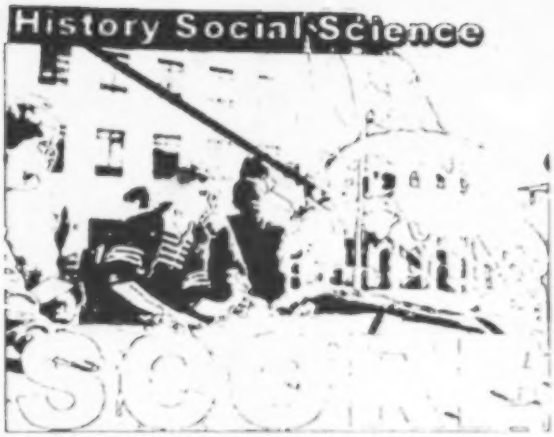


**Schools of California Online Resources for Education (SCORE): Connecting California's Classrooms to the World**

# Trailblazers – Now and Then

**Fifth Grade Activity**
**by Ralph Kline**

SO 034 525

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**http://score.rims.k12.ca.us/activity/blazers/**

**2001 (Revised)**

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# Trailblazers - Now and Then

Have you ever plotted a family trip or vacation on a map, figuring out the best routes to take and the places of interest along the way? Have you ever wondered who were the first men and women to blaze these trails? Were they native Americans, Spanish explorers from Mexico, or European immigrants looking for a way west? In this activity you are going to become explorers and map readers tracing the best routes to travel by land between various U.S. cities. You will then try to learn who were the first known explorers who broke these trails and who were the first groups of Americans to follow them.

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## The Task

You and your partner will determine all the possible and the best routes between two cities which your teacher will assign. Once you have agreed on the routes, you will highlight them on the maps provided you. Then, using topographical maps, you will determine if there is any route which seems the best based on the lay of the land. Next you will determine the route used by the early trailblazers - the Mountain Men and the pioneers. Then you will compare and contrast your highlighted route and the trailblazer's route, indicating where they are virtually the same, where they differ, and why. Finally, you will step back in history to the time of your pathfinder. Taking on the role of this pathfinder, you will give a first person presentation to the class, describing your place in American history.

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## The Process

There are many routes and many trailblazers. To help you understand the process we will choose one. Your teacher may assign other trails once you understand how to "blaze" them.

**Step#1**: With your partner, find the shortest highway route from Salt Lake City, Utah, to Los Angeles, California. Once you have agreed on the route, highlight it on your map of the Western United States.

**Step#2:** Now look at a topographical map of the region. Imagine it is 1826 and there are no roads. What problems would you face making the journey by horse and/or on foot. Brainstorm with your partner and list the problems you would face.

**Step#3:** Read the account of the journey of Jedediah Strong Smith in 1826 from the Cache Valley in Utah through the Indian Villages at what is now Needles, California. Then head through the Cajon Pass and into what is now the area of Southern California near Los Angeles. Compare and contrast the current road route with that taken by the Smith party. Prepare a brief paper on your conclusions.

**Step#4:** Read a summary of the life and accomplishments of Jedediah Strong Smith. Prepare a Living History presentation. You and your partner, in tandem, should become the legendary mountain man. Tell the class about the exploits of your short but important life.

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# Resources

Resources to be used in following the four steps above will vary, depending on the route and the personality your teacher has assigned you. The mapping resources will be useful in every project.

### Step#1: Finding the Shortest Route

Mapquest (http://www.mapquest.com/ ) will give a route you can follow on your map. It is very easy to use. Click Tripquest and follow the directions. You will be able to go city to city and will not need to fill in a specific address.

### Step#2: Study the Topographical Map

You may find topographical maps available in class. On line you can find a topographical map of each state at http://fermi.jhuapl.edu/states/states.html

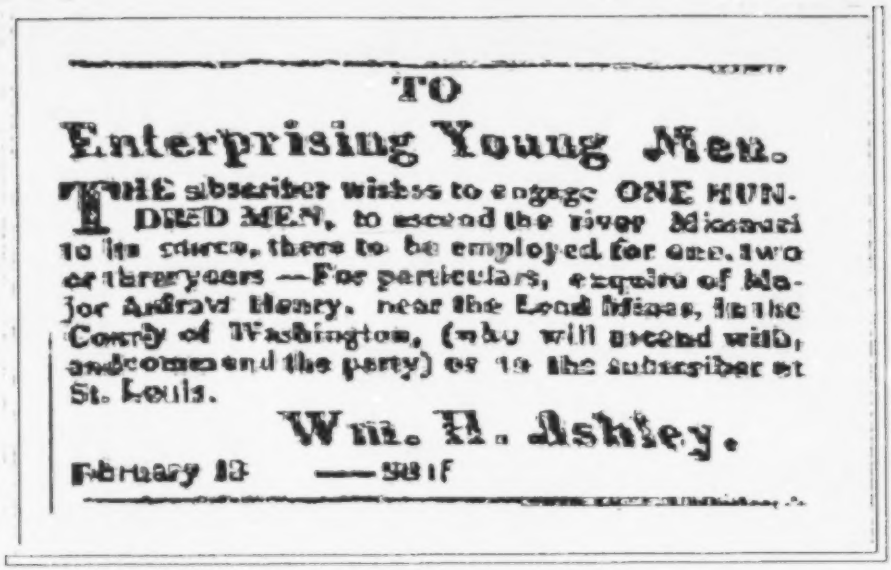
You need to be able to see a topographical map of the entire region to make sense of the travels of the Trailblazers. Your teachers will be able to direct you to such a map.

### Step#3: Biographies of Jedediah Strong Smith

Brief biographies can be found on line at http://www.biography.com/ and at http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/HNS/Mtmen/jedesmith.html. A bit more information can be found in encyclopedias, either CD ROM or standard book form. Your school and local; library will have further information in the form of biographies or surveys with chapters about the various Mountain Men.

### Step#4: History in the First Person

Becoming a character from history can be a lot of fun. In classes that do this a lot the teacher often will demonstrate just what is expected of you. You can dress as the character, but often a simple prop such as a hat will be enough to allow you to come out of character and become another person. It is often best not to attempt an accent unless you are very good at it. You want to avoid anything which will make the class laugh when it is not supposed to. Speaking from memory is best, but often the teacher will allow flash cards when you are just beginning. Good luck. You will remember your whole life the character you perform and you will carry with you an interest to learn more about the person and the period they lived through.



TO

Enterprising Young Men.

THE subscriber wishes to engage ONE HUNDRED MEN, to ascend the river Missouri to its source, there to be employed for one, two or three years.—For particulars, enquire of Major Andrew Henry, near the Lead Mines, in the County of Washington, (who will accompany and command the party) or to the subscriber at St. Louis.

Wm. H. Ashley.

February 13 ——981f

## Learning Advice

To trace the roads from Salt Lake City to LA you will need to have a complete picture of the road system of Utah, Nevada and California. Look at the big picture. Study the maps of all three states. Identify the places you have been. Try to remember the mountains, forests and deserts. Try to imagine that you were hiking in the area.

As you use the various web sites, explore them and see what else you can learn. Many of the sites are like icebergs. Just a little is showing. Ninety percent is hidden unless you take the time to explore.

## Evaluation

The project will be evaluated using the map you prepared with current road tracings and the tracing of the trailblazer route. You will be responsible for the compare and contrast paper prepared in step 3. Finally, your first person presentation will be a large part of the evaluation.

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## Reflection

Questions to be discussed when the project is finished.

1. What made the trailblazer a success?
2. What are the influences of the Trailblazer's discoveries today?
3. Are there any more trails to be blazed? Where are they?

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## Conclusion

By doing this project you have learned a process - a way of studying the trailblazers whose heroism and fearless dedication opened up the western United States. There are so many more journeys you could trace: Robert Stuart and the discovery of South Pass; Jedediah Smith and the rediscovery of South Pass; Joseph Walker and the journey when he became the first explorer to see Yosemite Valley; Joseph Walker and the discovery of Walker Pass; John Colter and his trek through Yellowstone Park; Jedediah Smith as he became the first Mountain Man to cross the Sierra Nevada from West to east using Ebbets Pass; the Bidwell-Bartleson party and the countless other emigrants who opened and followed the trails west in the 1830's and 40's.

You will learn a lot from these pioneers. Is there any area where you can become a trailblazer? Don't look for mountain passes and waterless deserts. Look for places and situations closer to home where others fear to go. Blaze trails in the area of racial and ethnic relations. Clean up the trails by learning about and tackling the ecological problems which threaten to turn the west into a chemical garbage dump. Look for a problem to be solved and you will have found another trail to be blazed.

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# Teacher Notes

**Grade Level/Unit**
H/SS Framework Grade 5: U.S. History and Geography: Making a New Nation
Unit 7: Westward Expansion

**Standards**

History/Social Studies Standards Grade 8:

- Students describe the divergent paths of the American people 1800-1850 and the challenges they faced with emphasis on the West, including the social and political effects of Manifest Destiny and its relationship to the acquisition, exploration and settlement of the trans-Mississippi West from the Louisiana Purchase and how the effects of geography, climate, canals and river systems, economic incentives, and frontier spirit influenced the distribution and movement of people, goods and services.

Language Arts Standards Grade 8:

- Reading: Students read and understand grade-level appropriate material. They describe and connect the essential ideas, arguments, and perspective of text, and they relate test structure, organization and purpose.
- Listening and Speaking: Students deliver focused, coherent presentation that convey ideas clearly and relate to the background and interests of the audience. Student speaking demonstrates command of standard English and the excellent organization and delivery strategies.

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## Lesson Purpose (Outcomes)

The Students will:

1. become more proficient at reading standard road maps and topographical maps.
2. learn about the lives of one or more pathfinders who opened the trails to the West.
3. give a Living History presentation, becoming a character from the past.

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## Length of the Lesson

This is a project with many variables. The initial map work (with road maps and topographical maps) can be done in two 40 minute periods if the entire class has access to maps or an on-line computer lab. The study of the individual trailblazers might well require a week's time since more than likely the student will have to visit the school or public library and read on their own. The presentation of the first person reports can be spread out over weeks with a schedule of two a day set up. First slot the volunteers; then assign presentation times for the rest, remembering that they will be presenting in pairs.

## Resource Materials Needed

The lesson on Jedediah Smith and the route to California via Cajon Pass is but one of many trailblazer projects which can be assigned. For all these projects you will need:

1. Maps of the western United States - one for each pair or group. (Automobile club members can get individual maps.) Maps of the standard fold out road map variety are the easiest to use because of their size.

2. Topographical Maps: These are available on line at http://fermi.jhuapl.edu/states/states.html. Ideally you would have one posted in the class. For a catalog describing magnificent topographical maps contact:

   **Raven Maps and Images**
   **P.O. Box 850**
   **Medford. OR 97501-0253**
   **800-237-0798**

3. Information on the various trailblazers. Here a bit of ingenuity is required. Very simple biographies are available at www.biography.com. Encyclopedias (text and CD ROM) will be a bit more informative. A search by name on the various search engines will not be satisfying. The best resources for trailblazer information are books and journals readily available at libraries or for purchase. To get a feel for what is available go to http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/subst/index2.html/6522-3111478-582249 to open up a megabook store. Type in by subject, Mountain Men or Fur Trade, or Jedediah Smith and a world of available books will open to you, many obtainable in two or three days. (They do arrive that quickly.)

   In any event, you will need at least a few books which devote a chapter to each of the various personalities who are the trailblazers. Here are two which have proved very helpful:

**Westward: The Epic Crossing of the American Landscape by Gerald Roscoe and David Larkin, The Monacelli Press, 1995: ISBN 1-885254-09-1**

**Jedediah Smith and the Mountain Men of the American West by John Logan Allen Chelsea House Publishers, 1991: ISBN 0-7910-1319-7**

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## Background Information That Might Be Helpful

What is described in the lesson is a single application of a project which could easily have fifteen applications going at the same time. The number attempted depends on teacher interest and background. Here is a list of some of the other possibilities.

1. Robert Stuart and the discovery of South Pass(1812). A class which has studied the journey of Lewis and Clark will recognize the difficulty which the Corps of Discovery had crossing The Great Divide when it became evident that there was no water route to the Pacific Ocean. In 1811 Robert Stuart led a party from Astoria, OR to St. Louis and in the process found the only spot in the Divide where wagons would be able to pass through. For all practical purposes he discovered the Oregon Trail years before the wagons began to roll. South Pass was to the west what the Cumberland Gap was to the settlement of the Trans-Appalacian east. Further reading will show that Jedediah Smith rediscovered the Pass in the 20's and Benjamin Bonneville led a large expedition of discovery through the pass in the early 1830's.

2. Jedediah Smith and the first passage by a Mountain Man, west to east, through Ebbetts Pass (1826). The travel of the Smith party in Alta California and his contact with the missions and the Mexican government is fascinating. His crossing of the Sierra range in winter is epic.

3. Joseph Walker and his California expedition (1833). Walker crossed the Great Basin of Nevada, pioneering the trail which so many would follow into California. He entered California across the Sierra at present day Yosemite Park, wintered at Mission San Juan Bautista and Monterey and left California by crossing the Sierras Nevadas near Bakersfield by what is now known as Walker Pass.

This is just a taste. Other names which could lead to Trailblazer Projects are Zebulon Pike (Pike's Peak); William Ashley and the American Fur Company; Nathaniel Wyeth; James Colter (Yellowstone Park); the Bidwell-Bartleson party, the first wagon train using the Oregon Trail and opening the California Trail years before the Gold Rush; Jim Bridger, whose fort marked the point where so many other trails split off from the main trail to Oregon; Brigham Young and the Mormon migration (perhaps the best documented of all the journeys to the west).

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